

Thursday, March 17, 2011

In a recent speech to a VFW convention in Arlington, Va., Secretary of Veterans Affairs Erik Shinseki listed among the agency's priorities "to increase veteran access to VA benefits and services, [and] reduce and ultimately eliminate the backlog in disability claims ..."

A member of Georgia's congressional delegation might have just offered the secretary -- himself a distinguished and highly decorated veteran -- an idea that would help the VA fulfill those goals. Rep. Sanford Bishop, after listening to area vets in a series of town hall meetings, suggested that the Defense Department should let Martin Army Community Hospital at Fort Benning serve as a VA medical center as well.

As a practical contribution to the Wounded Warrior effort, this idea would seem to make sense, and Bishop has officially requested a study of its feasibility.

Currently, many vets have to travel to Tuskegee for medical care -- about a 45-minute drive from Columbus, and even farther away for other area veterans who could make the trip to Fort Benning a lot more easily.

Bishop definitely has an idea worth pursuing. If he hasn't already enlisted Shinseki's support, he should try to get the secretary on board. Our veterans don't need long waits and long drives to get the care we owe them.

Bishop isn't the only Georgian in Washington with a good idea. Sen. Johnny Isakson, who was in real estate long before he was in politics, made the astute suggestion that federal regulators should significantly reduce a proposed 20 percent down payment for home buyers. Obviously, the down payment was conceived as a fiscal security measure in response to the bad home loans that crashed the housing market, scores of banks and much of the economy in

recent years.

But such a sum, even in a buyer's market, would put home ownership beyond the means even of qualified and responsible would-be purchasers. "Worst of all," the senator said, "it would give the American people only one alternative for lending, the Federal Housing Administration, which is already burdened and could create the situation for another collapse."

Isakson was a member of the bipartisan group that authored the residential mortgage clauses in the 2010 Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act ("Dodd-Frank"), and he knows what he's talking about.

Buying a home should still be an achievable part of the American Dream, even if bad political and fiscal choices that made it seem too easy led us into an economic crisis.

Attracting qualified home buyers is what will revive the market. Putting home ownership out of the reach of all but those with big chunks of ready cash will only prolong the slump.